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Your Money's Worth in Cotton Goods

U.S. Department of Agriculture

A broadcast by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Tuesday, February 11, 1941, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, over stations associated with the NBC Blue network.

--ooOoo--

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Here we are in Washington. And as usual on Tuesday, Ruth Van Deman is with us to report for the Bureau of Home Economics. And after we hear from Miss Van Deman, John Baker will give us more news on some of the other activities of the Department of Agriculture.

And now, Ruth Van Deman.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Thank you, Wallace Kadderly. By the way one of our Farm and Home friends asked me the other day how you spell your last name. She said she couldn't tell whether Kadderly started with a C or a K.

KADDERLY:

I hope you told her K ... as in Kamchatka--Keokuk--Kansas--Katahdin----

VAN DEMAN:

No, I didn't chase the K's over the map, or even into the kitchen. I just spelled Kadderly---K a d d e r l y----as though I were in a spelling match.

KADDERLY:

Thanks, Ruth, I'll do the same for you some day. Van Deman is another name that puzzles the spellers.

VAN DEMAN:

Right now, though, let's hop along to cotton goods --- cotton spelled with a C.

KADDERLY:

The C in cotton stands for cash crop, too, ---- the South's biggest cash crop. About a third of the farmers in the United States live on farms producing cotton and depend on cotton as their main source of income. But it's an ironical fact that the income of many of the people who grow cotton has been so low that they can't buy a great many things they need....including things made of the cotton they produced.

VAN DEMAN:

I know. Cotton's our cheapest, most plentiful fiber. It does seem as though it should mean clothes, curtains, coverlets, carpets, chair coverings----all sorts of clean, comfortable, convenient things to wear and to use around the house ----especially for the people who raise the cotton.

KADDERLY:

A supplementary cotton stamp plan has been developed to do just that for millions of people in the South....a double-barrelled plan to help in reducing the

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KADDERLY: (Cont'd)

big surplus of raw cotton just now getting under way. Cotton farmers who hold down their acreage below their Triple A allotments and who plant less cotton than in 1940 will receive cotton stamps that they can take to the store and use to buy new cotton goods. The idea is to head off greater future increases in the cotton surplus and at the same time cut down the present surplus by greater use of cotton products.

VAN DEMAN:

And isn't it true that when more cotton farmers use more cotton goods that will mean more work and more cash to lots of other people?

KADDERLY:

That's right. ---to people who work in cotton mills, garment factories, stores. It will give them work and wages.

VAN DEMAN:

And they----the city people----will be able to buy more sheets, and towels, shirts, and dresses.

KADDERLY:

Right again. That will take more of the cotton farmer's crop out of the warehouse, into clean, comfortable, convenient things to wear and use around the house. That's the way the cycle works.

VAN DEMAN:

The other day I was out at our new laboratories at the Beltsville, Maryland, research center. I talked to several of the women doing research on cotton fabrics, starting with Ruth O'Brien, head of all our textile and clothing work. I was after their latest suggestions on buying cotton goods to get dollar's worth for each dollar spent.

KADDERLY:

Certainly the home economics researchers should know if anybody does.

VAN DEMAN:

It's true they have run lots of tests, on lots of fabrics---wash tests, rub tests, light tests. They've analyzed a lot of low-priced goods for the cooperative stores where some of the families working with the Farm Security Administration do their purchasing.

KADDERLY:

How do those low-cost fabrics stand up?

VAN DEMAN:

Some of them very well, considering what they sell for. Some for instance with marks on the selvage saying "sun and tubfast colors" held the dye very well.

But some others were bought entirely on faith. They had no labels or tags to indicate anything about their colorfastness or any other wearing quality, and they were a sorry sight after they came out of the soapsuds.

KADDERLY:

You might say a "wash out"?

VAN DEMAN:

A complete-wash out, yes. I remember one cretonne---a pretty looking fabric --with a brown and black leaf design on a two-toned green background. After fabric met soapsuds, nothing was left of color or design except a few black lines and some blotches of faded pink.

KADDERLY:

You mean the green background went almost white.

VAN DEMAN:

I do. As white as though it were meant to be white. And the starch and other sizing that made the new fabric feel stiff and strong had gone with the wash too.

KADDERLY:

Could the woman who bought curtains off that bolt have been forewarned?

VAN DEMAN:

She could if she had taken a sample home and washed it first. That's what our grandmothers always did. They had no labels at all to help them.

KADDERLY:

Aren't some of the labels now rather vague--too vague to be very helpful?

VAN DEMAN:

Some are, yes. But it's no easy matter to set standards for colorfastness to light, and water, and all the things that can make dyes run and fade.

KADDERLY:

What about shrinkage in cotton goods? It seems to me that whether cotton goods will or will not shrink is one of the most important things to check on.

As you suggested a moment ago, Ruth, most cotton fabrics sooner or later have to take a dip in soapsuds--often warm soapsuds.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, that's one of the great virtues of cotton that it can take that dip and come out fresh and clean.

There's this to remember when you talk about shrinkage in cotton goods: When cotton fibers are spun into yarns and the yarns woven into fabrics, they're held under strong tension. And unless the manufacturer puts the fabric through a process to shrink it before it leaves his factory, it may lose a lot of length and width later when it's washed and ironed.

KADDERLY:

Aren't more and more cotton fabrics being put through a shrinkage process and labeled preshrunk?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, the labels go farther than pre-shrunk. If the word pre-shrunk is used at all, it has to be followed by a figure telling exactly how many percent you can still expect the fabric to shrink.

KADDERLY:

I suppose it's mainly on the higher-priced goods you find these shrinkage labels.

VAN DEMAN:

Not always. I've seen it on work shirts that sell for 50 cents retail. Shrinkage control is one of the big steps forward in the manufacture of cotton goods. And it's being applied to many types of fabrics.

I was looking at some of the new spring and summer cotton dress goods. The designs and the colors, by the way are the work of artists this year. They made me think of old-fashioned gardens and blue skies, and all sorts of pleasant things to come.

And on the wearing side, I was very much interested to see that many of these new dress fabrics are marked crease-resistant. That's a big item to a woman who wears a cotton dress in the office and want to look tidy when she goes out on the street.

KADDERLY:

Are crease or wrinkle resistant finishes like that permanent---will they stand the soapsuds dip?

VAN DEMAN:

They probably won't last the whole life of the fabric. But some of them will last through a good many launderings, if the washing and ironing is done carefully.

So far these special finishes are on the higher-quality cotton goods. Naturally it costs money to put a finish like that on a fabric.

KADDERLY:

But if you actually get more use out of the fabric, doesn't the extra price pay?

VAN DEMAN:

That's the question, when you buy many things. As Miss O'Brien said the other day when we were talking about designs on cotton goods, "Fine designs mean money--artists, special skill in the mill. The people who make the cotton into goods deserve a just return for their labor."

KADDERLY:

Well, if you can't get good design and good quality at the same time, wouldn't it be better to put the money into plain goods?

VAN DEMAN:

Much better. There are lots of ways of adding decoration----in stitching, by combining two plain materials, by scalloping edges. Our grandmothers showed us that too in the beautiful quilts they made even out of plain white muslin.

KADDERLY:

Ruth, didn't you have a bulletin up here once that covers some of the points on quality in fabrics?

VAN DEMAN:

You're probably thinking of the one Bess Morrison wrote "Judging Fabric Quality."

KADDERLY:

That's it.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, that bulletin tells a lot, by pictures as well as words, about choosing fabrics so as to get satisfactory wear.

KADDERLY:

If any of our Farm and Home friends want to know more about quality in fabrics then, the Bureau of Home Economics will send that bulletin?

VAN DEMAN:

Gladly. The three words "Judging Fabric Quality" on a post card will be all our mail room needs, plus the address of the sender. -- That is, the sender of the post card.

KADDERLY:

Well, Farm and Home friends, while Ruth Van Deman and Morse Salisbury are shifting places here at the microphone, I'll just repeat the title of that home economics bulletin -- Judging Fabric Quality.

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